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BARRON'SOnline**UN Agency Aims To Control Email Spam 'Epidemic'**

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DOW JONES NEWSWIRES
July 6, 2004 12:09 p.m.

GENEVA (AP)--The U.N. is aiming to bring an international "epidemic" of junk e-mail under control within two years by standardizing legislation around the world to make it easier to prosecute "spammers," an industry expert said Tuesday.

"(We have) an epidemic on our hands that we need to learn how to control," said Robert Horton, the acting chief of the Australian communications authority. "International cooperation is the ultimate goal."

Horton was among industry regulators from some 60 countries taking part in a meeting hosted by the International Telecommunications Union. The union, a Geneva-based U.N. agency, is planning to propose anti-spam legislation that will make cross-border cooperation easier.

Many nations have no such legislation in place, making it difficult to crack down on junk e-mail sent across borders.

Horton, who is chairing the meeting, said a top priority is pornographic material that "may come to the attention of children."

"I think it's time we did something formally about this," he said. "We will have to come to some sort of general understanding."

Up to 85% of all e-mail could be spam, the ITU estimates, up from 35% just a year ago. The vast majority is generated by a few hundred people, but authorities in many countries aren't able to prosecute many of them under current legislation.

Spam and anti-spam protection cost computer users some \$25 billion last year, according to the United Nations.

Now the problem is rapidly spreading to cell phones. Nine of every 10 spam messages in Japan are now directed to mobile phones as text messages, Horton noted.

Spamming is also being used in crime. One technique -known as "phishing" -involves sending e-mails that appear to be genuine correspondence from reputable companies. Recipients are asked for their bank details to clear up a mistake and then money is bled from their accounts.

"We need to build up cases against a number of known perpetrators in a big way," he said. "Once there is sufficient knowledge and a case against those people there will be concerted legal action taken against them."

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Learn more about Mr. Hoey's insight into today's markets. 

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